

Assessment of North Carolina's Driver Education Program: Students' First Formal Lesson on Interacting with People on Bikes

Annalisa Sims | amsims@unc.edu

Background

In 2024 North Carolina released its Strategic Highway Safety Plan to guide efforts to improve safety for all road users and support its goal to reach Vision Zero by 2050. While infrastructure design remains the necessary action (and preferred first step) for enhancing safety in multimodal environments, lengthy construction timelines and high costs leave communities looking for options in the interim. Driver education remains **an untapped tool** for introducing concepts of **sharing space** on the road, **multimodal transportation alternatives**, and cultivating a **culture of safety, empathy, and respect for all road users**.

Research Questions

In what ways does North Carolina's driver education program currently teach students to interact with people on bikes?

What opportunities exist within the current program to incorporate education on interactions between drivers and people biking?

Goals

This assessment will help us:

- **Understand current program** and how students are taught to interact with people biking
- **Identify gaps and opportunities** in driver education
- **Offer strategies to strengthen** program in support of NC's 2024 Strategic Highway Safety Plan.



(Photo credit: WLOS Staff)

2024 NC Strategic Highway Safety Plan: Emphasis Area Action Plans				
Strategy 5: Develop and promote public education programs that support education for all road users on safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and personal mobility users				
Supporting Action	Timeline			
Incorporate interactions with pedestrians, bicyclists , and users of personal mobility in the driver education curriculum.	2027			

	NC Driver Handbook	NC Driver Education Curriculum	NC Driver Licensing Test	Instructor Interviews: Classroom & BTW
Criteria	Mentions			Discussion
Bike Lanes	1	TBD	TBD	TBD
Turning	3	TBD	TBD	TBD
Yielding	0	TBD	TBD	TBD
Safe Passing	1	TBD	TBD	TBD
Dooring	0	TBD	TBD	TBD

Methods

- **Content analysis** of NC's driver handbook, curriculum, and licensing test based on criteria developed by League of American Bicyclists (LAB) in their 2019 report on driver education across the US
- **Semi-structured interviews** with instructors to gain insight into if and how classroom/behind-the-wheel (BTW) instruction addresses criteria

Initial Findings

- Changes to driver education will **require collaboration** across state organizations
- **Curriculum could vary** based on which driving school is used by school districts **requires further investigation*
- **Driver handbook holds opportunities** for greater discussion of multimodal interactions

Next Steps

- Complete analysis of curriculum & licensing test
- Conduct interviews with instructors
- Consolidate results and identify gaps
- Explore solutions to present